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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/PD, DRL/CRA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KCOR](#) [KPAO](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: CONVICTION IN MEDIA KILLING, BUT SLAYINGS CONTINUE

REF: A. MANILA 5521

[1](#)B. MANILA 5346

[1](#)C. MANILA 1595

[1](#)1. (U) This message is Sensitive But Unclassified --
Please handle accordingly.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: A Philippine court has sentenced a former policeman to life imprisonment for murdering a journalist, the first such conviction since 2000. The Philippines, however, remains a very dangerous place for members of the media with ten killed this year, including three in the past three weeks. Amid mounting criticism, GRP officials have promised a crack down. Mission continues to urge the GRP to apprehend and prosecute those responsible. End Summary.

Ex-Cop Convicted of Murder

[1](#)3. (U) On November 29, a Regional Trial Court in Cebu City convicted former police officer Guillermo Wapile for the murder of Edgar Damalerio in 2002. Damalerio was a journalist in Pagadian, Zamboanga del Sur Province in Mindanao, when he was shot and killed. The case was transferred to Cebu City in May 2005 after three witnesses, as well as the policeman who first responded to the crime, were murdered in the Zamboanga area. (Note: The police continue to investigate these latter four killings. End Note.) The court sentenced Wapile to life imprisonment and ordered him to pay Damalerio's family 135,000 pesos (approximately USD 2,500) in damages. Wapile is appealing the decision. According to the Philippine National Police (PNP) Criminal and Investigation Group "Task Force Newsmen," this is the sixth conviction for a murder of a member of the media since 1986 and the first since 2000. However, the National Union of Journalist of the Philippines (NUJP) says that there have only been three convictions total since 1986.

But Killings Continue

[1](#)4. (U) Despite the conviction, slayings of members of the media continue. Recent incidents have included:

-- December 1: George Benaogan, a reporter for DYDD Radio in Talisay City, Cebu Province in the central Philippines, was shot dead on December 1. Police have identified one of three suspects in the killing of Benaogan and charged him in absentia with murder, but no arrests have been made.

-- November 20: Two gunmen killed newspaper reporter Robert Ramos in Cabuyao, Laguna Province, located south of Manila. Police have identified two suspects, but have not yet made any arrests.

-- November 18: A lone gunman killed radio announcer Ricardo Uy in Sorsogon City, Sorsogon Province in southern Luzon. Police have not made any arrests in the case.

So far, ten members of the media have been slain in 2005. In 2004, a total of 13 were killed (see ref C for further background).

GRP Response

[1](#)5. (U) PNP Chief Arturo Lomibao reacted swiftly to the recent killings; he visited the sites of both Ramos' and Uy's killing and said he would be personally involved in the investigations. Secretary of Interior and Local Government Angelo Reyes also condemned the killings and promised a crack down. According to the PNP's Task Force Newsmen, there are 15 work-related cases involving murders of members of the media currently on trial.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Nonetheless, NGOs continue to criticize the government for failing to do enough to protect media personnel. The NUJP says that 73 media personnel have been slain since 1986 -- 36 since President Arroyo came to power in 2001, with the implication that the situation has worsened significantly on her watch. The NUJP has warned that some

members of the media are responding by arming themselves, offering bounties on those who have killed media personnel, and even talking of forming vigilante groups to fight back. Many in news organizations also note that the media has to do a better job of policing itself in order to rid itself of the tarnish of "envelope journalism." Such corruption effectively involves media personnel in local disputes, which can be very dangerous when those who are targeted lash out.

Comment

17. (SBU) International NGOs monitoring violence against journalists have labeled the Philippines the most dangerous country for journalists after Iraq. The conviction of the former policeman is encouraging and sends a signal, but much more effort on the part of the GRP is needed. The killing of media personnel, in addition to extrajudicial killings of alleged criminals and attacks on leftist activists (refs A and B), highlight the high-level of day-to-day violence in the Philippines. Mission continues to urge the GRP to apprehend and prosecute those responsible, and to underscore to Filipinos the need to respect the rule of law.

Jones